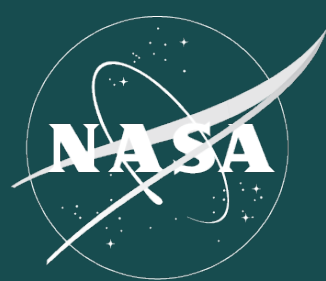


STENNIS SPACE CENTER

Profiles in Leadership



Born in Houma, Louisiana, Douglas graduated from Terrebonne High School. He received a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Southern University and A&M College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, a master's degree in engineering from the University of Alabama in Huntsville, Alabama, and a master's degree in engineering and management from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1983, Douglas joined NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center before transferring in 1989 to Stennis, the nation's largest propulsion test site. He went on to become director of the Stennis Safety & Mission Assurance Directorate before assuming his current role as deputy director of the Stennis Engineering & Test Directorate.

What were your career plans or dreams growing up?

I did not have definitive career plans or dreams. However, seeds were being planted by my parents – some by experiences they provided to me and some by the toys I got for Christmas. It was not uncommon for me to talk about my favorite football or baseball player, then immediately switch to talking about space via toys like Major Matt Mason.

How would you describe the Stennis workforce and culture?

Stennis is a unique place with a very special workforce. It can only get better as diversity and opportunities enter the toolkit to achieve mission success.

What are you proudest of regarding your work with Stennis?

As a leader, it is important to me to provide an environment that fosters holistic growth for those in my charge and those I mentor. So, I am proudest of seeing their lives, professionally and personally, change for the better.

How do you define leadership – and what are the most important qualities a leader can have?

I think it is important to realize that leadership is hard and does not necessarily fit in the box of a specific definition. Leadership has traditional qualities such as having a vision and being consistent about doing the right things. However, the contemporary work setting is constantly evolving. If you add in the quality of being a situationally adaptable leader, you will be on track to be effective in today's and tomorrow's environments. Adapting your leadership approach or style (e.g., participatory, servant, autocratic, democratic, etc.) is a must. Today's leaders must adjust at near real-time to be successful.

What sparked your interest in working for NASA?

I did not envision working for NASA, even after our family took two trips to Houston and after visiting Johnson Space Center. My environment was petrochemical all through high school and college. While I grew up and went to college only 90 miles from NASA's Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans, I heard very little about it, much less most other NASA centers. It was not until my last year or so in college, when there was a bit of talk about the launch of the new space shuttle, that all the dots connected. I was able to get a spot on the NASA interview list at my school's placement office. It was the first interview of my last semester in college. The rest is history.

What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your NASA career – and how did you overcome it?

Being a leader has been the greatest challenge. Embracing, and not avoiding, the challenge requires recognition that continuous learning and adaptation are keys to success.



Freddie Douglas III Deputy Director Engineering & Test Directorate

What are some of the most important lessons you learned during your NASA career?

Change is constant, and becoming comfortable with it is essential. Change can be leveraged as an opportunity.

What is the best advice you could offer someone seeking to grow in their career and possibly serve in a leadership role?

Realize you are always an apprentice, you are supposed to be uncomfortable, you have nothing to prove, and it is not about you.

What would you say to young people who might be thinking a NASA career is out of their reach?

Don't sell yourself short. NASA needs diverse sources of talent in order to achieve its complex missions.

What advice can you offer to individuals seeking to find a good work-life balance?

If you do not take care of yourself, you cannot begin to take care of your people, and, then, you cannot achieve mission success.